

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Coyt L. Jones - January 25, 1996

Q: This is Pauline Blount. I'm your interviewer for the Scott-Krueger Mansion Cultural Center. I have arrived at the home of Mr. Coyt Jones, here in the City of Newark. It is January the twenty-fifth, 1996, and the time is approximately 11 a.m. Good morning, Mr. Jones. How are you today?

Jones: Well, I'm fine thanks. Thank you.

Q: Could you give me your full name?

Jones: Coyt Leroy Jones.

Q: Okay. And your approximate age.

Jones: This is was born in 1916.

Q: Okay. And I would assume that you're retired and you're no longer working.

Jones: I am. Yes.

Q: Graduated from high school, did you go on to college?

Jones: I didn't go to college, unfortunately, no.

Q: Okay. What was your wife's name?

Jones: Ellen Lewis.

Q: And out of that marriage, how many children?

Jones: Two.

Q: Two children. I understand that one of those children is a very famous individual.

Jones: Yes. I think he's famous. He's very famous.

Q: All right. Would you mind sharing their names with me. First born.

Jones: First born is Leroy Jones. That's what I named him. He named himself Emiri Bharacha. The second is Sandra Elaine Jones.

Q: Okay. And what does Sandra do? Out of, did she produce any grandchildren? Emiri Bharacha still lives here in the City of Newark?

Jones: Yes.

Q: Okay. He's a well known poet.

Jones: Poet, playwright, activist.

Q: How about your parents? Were they born in the City of Newark?

Jones: No. My parents were born in South Carolina and they lived in South Carolina all of their lives except for a short period of time my mother lived in Newark. My father passed away when I was about two or three years old. My mother was born in South Carolina.

Q: Occupation. What did they do for a living?

Jones: My mother was a seamstress. Years ago, you know, most of the people made their clothes. They didn't buy them like they do now. They were made by.

Q: I assume that she was very popular and she probably had lots of?

Jones: Well, in the small town where we were born, she had mostly the people who were affluent I'll put it like that. Had a little money.

Q: And they would come to her because of the clothing.

Jones: No. That's not the way it worked. See, this is unusual I guess, but she would go to them. She'd probably stay a month at one person's house and then a month at some other person's house, like that. She'd make a lot of clothes in that time.

Q: Right. For the whole year or the whole family?

Jones: All year round she did that. Yes. The whole family. She'd go from one family to another.

Q: And stay from month to month.

Jones: Month to month. Sometimes maybe even two months. Whatever it took.

Q: Her prices, were they reasonable back then or?

Jones: I think so. I was so young I didn't even, I didn't know what money was at that time.

Q: Do you have any idea what she would have charged, let's say, for a dress?

Jones: Well, you know, years ago.

Q: And what year are we talking about?

Jones: We're talking about, I guess, back in the twenties, 1920 or something like that. I was born in 16. So from that time on, she was, I can remember maybe from 18 or 19, maybe. She sewed for a living that's all I can say.

Q: She sewed for a living.

Jones: She sewed for a living. And I used to thread the needle for her.

Q: Right. When you came, your family came to Newark, do you remember what year that was?

Jones: I came to Newark in 27, 1927. My family, my sister was already here. She must have come to Newark in about 25. I don't know exactly. But that's why I came to Newark. Had to have someone to. The rest of my family came later. I don't know. I don't remember the year. I know my mother was here for maybe two or three years.

Q: You did live with relatives when you came then?

Jones: Yes.

Q: How did you travel? By train.

Jones: Train.

Q: And someone met you at the destination when you arrived?

Jones: Oh not really. When I came, I hailed a taxi and came up to my sister's house.

Q: What was the amount of the taxi ride?

Jones: I don't remember. There's only one thing I can remember about that ride was the amount of people that crossed the street at Broad and Market. I had never seen that many people before.

Q: Were they African-Americans or were they?

Jones: They were all people, mostly white I think. This was years ago, remember? I asked the taxi driver if there was a fire someplace. Where was all the people going?

Q: You didn't know where they were going, right?

Jones: It's comical, but that's what happened.

Q: Okay. At the time that you arrived in Newark, during that time, did you know of anyone other than your own relatives?

Jones: No.

Q: Did you have a good journey traveling to Newark?

Jones: Yes. Didn't have to change trains at all. Just straight through to Newark.

Q: Did you have food and stuff on the train?

Jones: Yes. There was food for sale, like sandwiches and things like that.

Q: Okay. Was it good food or just something to fill in the hunger?

Jones: It was a piece of ham between two stale slices of bread. I remember that because I used the crust of the bread to stir my coffee.

Q: Really?

Jones: Sure did.

Q: Were you disappointed, let's say, when you came to Newark? And had you entertained the idea of going back to where you originated from?

Jones: Not really. At that time I was really young, and I had no real plans. No more than just coming to Newark. I wanted to leave the town where I was born. I was looking for a change, and, you know, being so young, I just wanted to get away.

Q: What kind of work did you look for when you got here?

Jones: Well, I looked for anything. I remember looking in the papers every day. There was a Newark Evening News newspaper at that time. I used to go downtown around eleven o'clock and buy the paper and look through the want ads. I found one or two jobs.

Q: What kind of work?

Jones: I guess you can say I did some of everything. The first thing I remember doing is I used to walk over on Prince Street and help the Jewish people, pardon me, unload their vegetables and fruit and what not for a few pennies. And then later, I got a job as a, in a barbershop on Park Place.

Q: African-American?



Jones: No.

Q: It was a white establishment?

Jones: White establishment on Park Place. And I moved from one barbershop to another. And I did pretty good.

Q: What did you do in the barbershop?

Jones: Shined shoes and mopped the floor. That's about it.

Q: Did you feel out of place in the white establishment?

Jones: I did. I really did at first. But later, I got used to it. Because when I moved to the second barbershop that I worked in, the owner made me feel at home. He was very friendly.

Q: Was he, what?

Jones: He was an Italian fellow.

Q: Okay. So he put on the welcome mat for you.

Jones: He did.

Q: How was the salary?

Jones: Well, I guess I was working. The salary was good because I was working on my own. I was shining shoes and I kept all the money. It was my business in other words.

Q: So you were actually an entrepreneur.

Jones: I even hired a man to work for me.

Q: You're kidding.

Jones: Certainly did.

Q: Really? How much did you pay him to be your employee?

Jones: I paid him. I've forgotten. I think it was nine or ten dollars a week or something. I've forgotten how much I paid him.

Q: So he felt great that he was working for someone, and that he was probably getting a good salary too.

Jones: He was getting something. You know, ten, fifteen dollars a week was pretty good for a kid years ago.

Q: Right.

Jones: And the barbers gave me two dollars. Each one gave me two dollars keep their counter clean, you know, where they work. Two dollars a week. So I think it was six or eight barbers. I've forgotten how many now. So it was a little extra.

Q: Great. As far as living conditions are concerned, you were living with your parents?

Jones: No. I lived with my sister at first.



Q: Okay. What was the neighborhood like?

Jones: Well, it was South Orange Avenue around Rankin Street, and it wasn't too bad, but it wasn't real good either. It wasn't an elite neighborhood, but it wasn't bad.

Q: All African-Americans or was it mixed?

Jones: Mostly mixed.

Q: Were there any markets in the area, like delis and grocery stores or anything like that?

Jones: No. The only thing we had then weren't supermarkets. They were like the A&P had a store, and maybe a little store up the street we called Dirty Sam. He had a store that sold everything. And down the street was a candy store. That's what you had in those days. You didn't have supermarkets.

Q: You could buy meat and all the household products and all that.

Jones: Yes. You bought them from A&P. It was just a little store, wasn't a supermarket. Now they have supermarkets.

Q: Were you able to buy the kind of foods that you, as an individual, would like to eat?

Jones: Yeah from Dirty Sam's. We could get collard greens and pork, you know, bacon and things like that. From the A&P we used to get coffee or tea or maybe other food.

Q: Dirty Sam, that was his nickname or?

Jones: Yeah. We called him Dirty Sam because he was always dirty. I don't know his name. All

I knew he.

Q: Was he African-American or?

Jones: No. No. I'm pretty sure he was Jewish.

Q: But he was always dirty --

Jones: He was always dirty.

Q: -- and always had the right stuff?

Jones: Always the right stuff that we needed, that we ate, in other words. You know, the collard greens.

Q: Right. Did he extend credit if you needed it?

Jones: I think so.

Q: Probably kept a book behind the counter or he kept it in his head?

Jones: Most likely he kept a book, you know. I'm pretty sure he kept a book. But, you see, I didn't do the shopping so I don't really know. My sister did all the shopping.

Q: So you were satisfied with the foods that were available in your community and you had enough food.

Jones: The problem we had was money. There was no money. But other than that, there was food available, good food.

Q: And you had a good relation family wise and all that stuff. What about clothing? Were there any stores that had clothing for African-American people or you just dressed regularly?

Jones: There were stores that we used to patronize that sold what we called a zoot type suit. Whatever. It was downtown. I've forgotten the name of it. There were places we could get a suit for twenty-two dollars. Howard Clothes. And there were two or three other names that I don't remember now. Then there was another one down there where mostly young people used to shop. Way out clothes.

Q: Zoot suits are considered the baggy look that we here in the 90s are experiencing. Is that basically what?

Jones: That's right. They was baggy clothes with the long chain hanging down.

Q: Wide brim hats.

Jones: Wide brim hats. Yes. Yeah, we had. You see Springfield Avenue in those days had a lot of stores up and down where we used to shop. We didn't have to go downtown to shop. We could do any shopping, shoes, clothes, anything you wanted, on Springfield Avenue.

Q: You could find.

Jones: You could find it there.

Q: Here in the 90s are any of those stores still open or still in existence?

Jones: They're not in existence. They've all been torn down and replaced by buildings, houses and living quarters.

Q: Did you adopt any of the aunt and uncle tradition, people that were not related to you or to your family? Were there any aunts or cousins that you called by that name even though they weren't related to you?

Jones: Two or three families that were close to my sister, I didn't call them aunt and uncle, but they were in the same category I guess. They were from the church where she attended. St. John's Methodist Church, used to be on Academy Street years ago.

Q: What church do you attend?

Jones: Bethany Baptist Church.

Q: Do you recall what year you joined Bethany or what year you became a member of any church?

Jones: I think it was 1984. I was a member of Methodist, my sister's church before that. But I loved the service at Bethany. The way they conducted service. Then besides my wife and my family were all members there, and had a lot to do with it.

Q: Then you decided to come aboard, right?

Jones: Yeah. I was attending Bethany anyway so I joined.

Q: What holidays did you celebrate back then like birthdays and weddings and Easter and Christmas. Were they special occasions in your household?

Jones: No special occasion. We just celebrated whatever holidays were designated as holidays. See, Martin Luther King was not born then. The holidays we celebrated then were the regular holidays. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, holidays like that. Easter. Yeah, we

celebrated Easter.

Q: As for the occasion.

Jones: Yeah. Parades. We used to have like a parade on Easter. We'd put on our wide brim hats and parade up and down Springfield Avenue, Broad Street.

Q: Probably all other families did the same thing so it was like a parade in itself.

Jones: Oh yeah.

Q: Everybody watching everybody and see what they had on or.

Jones: Right. Basically the girls. They used to parade up and down. And naturally we'd parade too because the girls were there. That was a good reason.

Q: So you were a girl watcher. [Laughter] As far as alcoholic beverages are concerned, were you a participant in smoking or drinking or dipping snuff or chewing tobacco?

Jones: I used to smoke like a pack of cigarettes a day, and I did take a little alcohol occasionally but I never liked the taste of it. I remember my son, I stopped drinking alcohol and I started drinking beer. We used to go out together, and I'd buy sodas for him and beer for myself. And he used to ask me all the time, why don't you drink soda like I'm drinking? Why do you drink beer? So I stopped drinking beer and started drinking soda.

Q: At the request. At the request of your son, Emiri Bharacha. As far as juvenile delinquency, how would you relate to that as far as incidents in crime, and compare that in the south where you lived. Was there much crime in the City of Newark?

Jones: When I was living in the south there was no crime. Once in a long while you'd hear some fellow beating up his wife or something like that. But it was nothing in comparison to what it is now. No crime. We could walk out any hour of the night or day without being afraid of anything. And when I first came to Newark, it was like that. There was probably crime, but we didn't hear about it. On Sunday afternoons we used to stroll out on Broad Street and window shop. Come in any hour we wanted to. No one was afraid of anything. Now it's a different story. You can't do that.

Q: How do you compare your relationships with whites and your relationships with whites? Would you say that it was different or indifferent?

Jones: My relationship, in the south I had no relationship so to speak with whites at all because I left at an early age. I knew probably one or two, but I had no relationship with them at all. My friends are black people. Here I had a wonderful relationship with whites up to a point because I worked in the Post Office and a lot of white people there, few blacks.

Q: No problem at all?

Jones: No problem. No problem. In fact, one of my best friends in the Post Office was a white supervisor. It wasn't so much that he was kind, it's just that we got along real well together because he was a southerner. I found that out. He was a southerner. And it seemed that me being a southerner, we got along well. I guess that's the reason. With others I've noticed he was real stern, but with me he was very relaxed. Anything I wanted.

Q: It was all right.

Jones: It was all right.

Q: As far as hunting and fishing and trapping, did you do any of that in the south?



Jones: No. While I was young, I visited my brother-in-law once and we went hunting. But then I was a grown man, married then.

Q: What jobs have you held here in the City of Newark?

Jones: Let's see. Worked for a shoemaker for a while out on Chancellor Avenue. Taught me how to repair shoes. I worked for, I guess you could call it a cleaning establishment down on Pacific Street who taught me how to press suits and dresses and whatever, different things. I was a presser at this place. After that is when I told you about the barbershop. Then I went to the Wisk Building as an elevator operator.

Q: Probably got to meet a lot of people on the elevator.

Jones: Oh yeah.

Q: Any well-known names that you could remember or one incident that stood out?

Jones: They were all white. Everybody in the building, all the tenants and what not in the building, office building. And the only blacks were the maintenance people and myself. And the only name that I can remember was there was two elevators and there was two elevator operators. I was one and a fellow named, I've forgotten his name. Anyway we got along real well together which was fine. Other than that nothing.

Q: Did they pay you by the hour or pay you a flat salary?

Jones: It was a flat salary. Eighteen dollars a week. I remember that.

Q: Any deductions? Did you have to wear a uniform?

Jones: No. No uniform. Nothing.

Q: Can you remember or there weren't any unions.

Jones: No unions. Nothing Just eighteen dollars a week. I remember I left that place and I went to a store on Market Street, well Bamberger's. When I left Wisk, I went to Bamberger's tried to get a job as an elevator operator there.

Q: They weren't hiring probably.

Jones: They weren't hiring my complexion people, and they told me that.

Q: They told you outrightly.

Jones: Oh yeah. Sure.

Q: What were they looking for a fairer skinner?

Jones: Fairer skinned. Real light complexion black. They said I was too dark. I agree with them.

Q: Point blank they said you're too dark, we can't hire you.

Jones: Yeah, well the starter told me that. They had a starter.

Q: Right. And how did you take that?

Jones: I didn't like it naturally. But I, you know, before I even went there I had heard that. And it really happened. It happened to me. You know, sometimes you hear things that are not true exactly.

Q: But then when you experience it, it's a different.

Jones: It's a different story then altogether.

Q: So you went from there to another location and got the same kind of job.

Jones: No. From there, I think from there I think I went out on Chestnut Avenue where I was telling you about. That's right. Because from Chestnut Avenue, I went into the Post Office. Yeah, I went out down Chestnut Avenue to the shoemaker. From there I went to Post Office.

Q: A lot of people working at the Post Office?

Jones: Oh yeah.

Q: Any well-known?

Jones: First of all, I was a letter carrier when I started. Then I became a clerk later. I met quite a few, a number of people as a carrier. A number of people.

Q: Any particular that you want to share with me?

Jones: A professor at West Side High gave me a whole bunch of books that I brought home. Yeah, you know, novels and what not. My son ate them up. He really read everything I brought in.

Q: That was great.

Jones: [?] books and things like that, you know Yeah, I attended West Side even before they finished the school.

Q: Really?

Jones: They were still building on the back of it.

Q: Politically, have you ever gotten involved or became active here in Newark in politics?

Jones: I've never really been in politics. I've helped a lot particularly when Kennie Gibson was running for mayor.

Q: What role did you play in helping him in his campaign?

Jones: Well, passing out different, passing out literature and having things with coffee parties or something they call them.

Q: Coffee klatches.

Jones: People in my home. Yes. Different things like that. I wasn't really into politics because, you know, being in the Post Office, I couldn't get into active politics.

Q: Because of government?

Jones: Yeah. At that time, they had some kind of bill. We worked for Gibson. Me, my son, his organization. See, we all worked for Gibson because, you know, he was a black man.

Q: How many times did he serve?

Jones: Four, wasn't it? Sixteen years I believe.

Q: Would you consider him as being a role model?

Jones: Gibson?

Q: Yes.

Jones: I think I should because we don't have too many role models here in Newark for young black people. And he had shortcomings, in fact, we all have shortcomings. Gibson had then. But I still think he should be a role model.

Q: As far as community life is concerned, what information could you share with me about newspapers or magazines that were, black radio, talk show, anything like that. Do you recall any of those things being run by African-Americans?

Jones: Yes. I don't have the card with me. But I have a card that Mr. Clark, he was an editor of a newspaper, a black newspaper, had offices on West Market Street, right next to the old Bethany Church. I think it was up in the next block. It was I believe. But I've forgotten the name of the newspaper. He gave me a card as a reporter, a press card, and I could get in the games free down at Rupert Stadium. But Mr. Clark was, I guess he was like a one man newspaper publisher and editor or what not.

Q: What did he have his own store or did he work out of his home?

Jones: He had an office on the second floor. I think it was on the corner of Newark and West Market. Upstairs over a drug store. I believe that's where it was.

Q: Any other black newspapers that you recall or any radio shows?

Jones: Well we had the, actually the Amsterdam News and the other one. That's a long time ago, those papers. I think the Amsterdam News is still going in New York. There was another black newspaper that was even more popular than the Amsterdam.

Q: What relationship did you have with other communities, other than the Newark community or other people that live in your area? Did you go outside of the state to, let's say, celebrate any special days or any occasions?

Jones: Not really. I've been outside of the state a number of times, but it wasn't to celebrate any special days. I was very interested in bowling for a long time, a number of years. And I used to with this bowling organization that I belonged to, bowling in different tournaments. That was only for the, I was trying to make money. I never made any, but I keep trying.

Q: At least you tried right?

Jones: I tried yes.

Q: As far as shops were concerned, could you give me an idea of, let's say, downtown, what stores were owned by African-Americans? Or considered to be some of the best stores in the City of Newark.

Jones: There was only one store down there which was an African store. That was owned by African-Americans. The stores that, probably some stores had, used African-American people as come ons or whatever you want to call it. They employed blacks, some of them did. But, you know, they were like token blacks. And had no, they didn't own anything outright. But this store was an African store over Broad Street, somewhere over past New Street over there somewhere. Years ago, I even knew the fellow's name. He passed away with a heart attack not too long ago. Can't think of it.

Q: The Mayor of Springfield Avenue, do you remember him?

Jones: The Mayor of?



Q: Springfield Avenue.

Jones: Who was the Mayor of Springfield Avenue? That was part of Newark. I think Gibson was the mayor of everything.

Q: I think this is a little bit before Mayor Gibson's time. There was a mayor I guess that acquired the name of the Mayor of Springfield Avenue, and evidently he was a well-known individual.

Jones: There was Adenizio before Gibson. And before Adenizio, you know, at one time we had a commission type government here in the City of Newark. We had five commissioners. And I don't know whether they called him the mayor of Springfield Avenue or not. I've never heard of it.

Q: Did he have a great influence on people, or simply African-Americans?

Jones: I think so because he was the mayor, you know, and everybody. He was a Jewish fellow.

Q: Lived in the community or he lived outside?

Jones: He lived outside I believe.

Q: And he would come in and sort of dictate.

Jones: Most of the people, you know, even if they lived in Newark before they would move out to the suburbs.

Q: What do you remember regarding local personalities such as William Ashby who was an early black social worker here in Newark?

Jones: I've heard of him, you know, but I didn't know anything about him personally, nothing at all. But I'd heard of him years ago. You know, we were young then and we didn't care too much about what was going on. You know, we were looking out for ourselves. Just now that came on again.

Q: What about Irving Turner?

Jones: Yeah, Irving Turner was, Irving Turner was related to my wife some way you know?

Q: Was he?

Jones: Yeah. Through marriage, you know. He married my wife's cousin. I don't even know the relationship really. But I know she was, people would say, oh go to your cousin and ask him to do so and so. But we called him Ike.

Q: Ike Turner.

Jones: Yeah. He was a newspaper man. He used to run all over town, and he was a worker. He was good. Problem is in the public eye, whatever they're doing, you know, if they're real busy, you're going to hear stories about them. Ike Turner was, I thought he was a good man.

Q: Institutions, black institutions, like hospitals and hotels and banks, were there any in the community?

Jones: We had a black bank on West Market Street that folded years ago.

Q: Do you remember what the name was?

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Q: Were there any hospitals?

Jones: One black hospital on Kenney Street. Kenney Hospital it was called. Dr. Kenney was the, on West Kenney Street. My wife worked in there for a while in the office. She was never medical.

Q: As far as music was concerned, black music in Newark, do you recall listening to jazz or gospel or blues? And tell me the places that you heard this kind of music.

Jones: A place on Springfield Avenue we used to go to. Savvoy Sultans played in there a lot. That was a group from here. They moved on over to New York. And the auditorium out on, at that time Belmont Avenue. Then downtown here on Broad Street, there was a ballroom on the corner of Broad and Hill. We used to go there a lot. Then ballrooms over a little further on Broad Street. Beacon Street we had the [?] place on Beacon Street we used to go dances.

Q: Dances?

Jones: I used to attend a lot of them, yes.

Q: You became a wallflower? Is that it?

Jones: No. I wasn't really a wallflower. And the place up on Morris Avenue called Dollinger's Auditorium. We used to go up there for dancing. We had everybody here, you know. Chick Webb from years ago came here. Count Basie. The big bands used to come through.

Q: Did you have to pay to get in or?

Jones: Oh yes. Sure.

Q: How much did you have to pay?

Jones: Well, it's usually fifty, seventy-five cents, up to a dollar.

Q: That was for one or two people?

Jones: One.

Q: Go in and stay as long as you wanted to.

Jones: Oh yeah. You stayed until it was over. It was usually over at two o'clock.

Q: What about food and drinks? Did they serve?

Jones: No.

Q: No food and no drinks.

Jones: No food, no drinks. Dancing, good music, the big band music. Chick Webb was here before Ella Fitzgerald starting singing with him.

Q: Really?

Jones: Yeah.

Q: You're kidding.

Jones: That's right. She wasn't singing with him at the time he was here. Started later.

Q: The Newark Eagles. Do you recall them?

Jones: Oh yeah.

Q: What can you tell me about the Eagles?

Jones: Well, my son and I have never missed a Sunday going down to see them play. Every Sunday we'd go down. They were a pretty good team. I remember one or two of the players. Monty Irving, Larry Doby. There was a pitcher that just passed recently. The guys that owned the saloon over here on Warren Street, I believe, Len and Len's Saloon, they played with them. All of those players. They were all. I remember one fellow, Hughes Suttles, he played with them. He was an outfielder. He was their power hitter. And the catcher was a big, husky fellow. And his nephew was a great pitcher for one of the major league teams. Things really get away from you, you know, after years.

Q: Yeah, they do. Any remembrance about black gangs? Were there any gangs? Let's say, you know, twenty or twenty-five years ago that you recall. And what impact did they play on the community?

Jones: Well, no. Not really. We had a couple of lawyers here in the city. Bursar Burrell, he was a lawyer here. He tried to do something. But he really.

Q: Get off the ground.

Jones: No. Not really. Because it was very hard to get people to really unite years ago. People were afraid. Most of us had jobs that didn't pay much money, you know.

Q: Right.

Jones: Menial salaries. Afraid of losing those jobs. For instance, I had two children. I had to keep a job on account of keep a little food on the table.

Q: Right. Keep them in school.

Jones: Keep them in school, that's right. And especially when both of them started, went away to college, it was a real strain on a postman's salary. Very.

Q: A strong belief in your faith sort of pull you through.

Jones: That's right. And my in-laws, you know, were very religious. The Russers. I don't know whether you remember them or not. Very religious type people. And so we had a religious. We lived together for a while. And, you know.

Q: How well academically did black students seem to perform? Do you recall?

Jones: Very well. But I remember a lot of blacks that came out of college and couldn't find jobs years ago. We had, oh, three or four of them in the Post Office. And, you know, you don't go to college to work in the Post Office.

Q: No. You don't.

Jones: So we had more than three or four. Quite a number of them in there. College graduates, couldn't find a job doing anything. So they took, naturally, the next best thing. I happened to work in the Post Office because my brother-in-law and I made a bet.

Q: And what was that?

Jones: He had tried to pass the examination three or four times, and he flunked each time. So I

kidded him about it. My sister's husband. And he says, well, I bet you can't pass it. So we bet two dollars, two whole dollars. [Laughter]

Q: And you won.

Jones: I passed it. Yeah. And the first time they called me in I told them I didn't want it. But I didn't say it in so many words. I just said, keep me on the list. I'm not ready for it now. You know, words to that effect. So sure enough, about a year later, they called me, and the second time they called me I was out of a job.

Q: So you took it.

Jones: I took it. Yeah. I took it, and for thirty-five years on that two dollar bet, worked in the Post Office.

Q: So you got the better part of the game and stayed with it.

Jones: He finally passed later. But he passed as a mail handler, couldn't pass the clerk's exam. I should be grateful to him I guess for that.

Q: For that bet.

Jones: Yeah. Pushing me into. And that's really what happened all right. A little two dollar bet. I don't even remember now whether he ever paid me or not.

Q: He probably. Maybe he didn't.

Jones: I don't think he did. I don't think he paid me.



Q: When do you feel black life in Newark reached its highest peak? What year?

Jones: Well, I think during the time when Gibson was elected as mayor, right after that. I think black life reached its highest peak. It could be even now. Because I understand that great strides are being made now for black people. I thought at that time, right after the Gibson elections, say a year later, I thought we were on top. My son had his organization going full force, and everything seemed rosy. It seemed like we were making great strides at that time. And I'm sorry to cut you off. Now what was your question?

Q: Any low points, do you feel that Newark has reached? And what's so bad about that particular incident that it should be classified as the low point?

Jones: I can't think of any low points right now. And there were probably many, but I can't think of any right now.

Q: Well, you've enjoyed living in the City of Newark and it's a nice place to stay.

Jones: I've enjoyed it really. Overall, I've enjoyed living in Newark. And had opportunities in the past years to move out of Newark. Right after I got married, I had an opportunity to buy a house in Vauxhall. And I turned it down. At that time Vauxhall was a, like a farming community. But it would have been nice. I think of it now, it would have been nice for the children. Orange and Plainfield and I've turned them all down. I wanted to stay in Newark. I've never lived out of Newark since I left home.

Q: Do you recall meeting or hearing about Louise Scott?

Jones: I recall hearing about her. I've never met her. I never had the opportunity. I heard she was a wonderful woman. She's a beautiful hair dresser.

Q: Did you visit her home on High Street, the Scott-Krueger Mansion?

Jones: No. I never visited.

Q: You know the location is on High Street here in Newark.

Jones: High and Court. Yeah.

Q: High and Court. Did you or anyone you know work for the family of the Scott-Krueger Mansion?

Jones: No one I know. I know the place was being used during the war for a.

Q: For a lookout post. Why did they name it lookout post?

Jones: Well, during the war we were looking out for enemy planes or whatever you want to say. They had different posts. And one was the Krueger building, I think, up on Belmont Avenue. And then the Scott Mansion. This is hearsay stuff I'm talking about. I don't know that personally.

Q: Would physical bodies be looking out?

Jones: Yes. My father-in-law used to look out up on the Krueger place up on Belmont Avenue.

Q: Hours, how many hours did he stay up there? He'd just go and.

Jones: I think it was, there was other people doing it, but I think he would go and stay maybe two hours, three hours. Something like that.

Q: And who did he report to?

Jones: Don't know whether it was a reporting thing or not. See, it was like a, the way I understood it, it was a group of people got together and said, look, we've got to do this; we've got to do that. Or perhaps the government asked for help, and they did it. Working for the state. So it could have been connected with that.

Q: Mr. Jones, how would you sum up your experiences living in Newark?

Jones: I like it here. So naturally I'm going, whatever I say is going to be in favor of Newark. Although I don't like what's going on now in Newark. But overall.

Q: In what aspect?

Jones: As far as the crime and the things like that. But, overall, I love it in Newark. I'd rather be here than a lot of other places I know. I've had the opportunity of moving back to the south, and I turned it down.

Q: With friends and extended families, I would put you at this point here.

Jones: Everyone passes through Newark today. I know it's not true, but it seems that way. Cause here in Newark you meet a lot of different people, a lot of people. And maybe because I'm connected with my son's organization of they're gonna rob him or what not. And I've been fortunate enough to meet quite a few people. Or I guess you would call them celebrities.

Q: Anybody in particular you want to talk about?

Jones: Not really. But I've met a lot of people. I was not fortunate enough to meet Martin Luther King, Dr. King. When he was here, he and my son sat down and talked for quite a while.

Q: And you regret about not meeting him in person, or do you feel just as good that your son got

a chance to meet and sit and talk to him? Do you feel good about that?

Jones: I wish I had been there while they were talking. That I wish. I've wished a lot of times. I think I would have enjoyed it. Perhaps I could have put in my one or two cents worth. But just to talk to Dr. King I think was a wonderful experience. Just listen to him. A lot of people in Bethany, especially.

Q: Bethany is your church?

Jones: Yes. And Bethany is a wonderful church. I love it. I love the services. I love everything.

Q: What role do you play that make you feel good about belonging to Bethany?

Jones: Well, as you know, I'm a deacon at Bethany. And I'm the financial secretary of the Deacon Board. And as such, I'm like a leader in the deacon's room. Because they come in, everyone expects me to know the answers to everything. I don't, but I give them the impression that I do.

Q: So that, you know, it's a good relationship between people that come in looking to you because they feel that you do have all the answers, so they look up to you.

Jones: Yeah, that's the truth.

Q: And how long have you been a deacon?

Jones: Since 1985.

Q: And being a financial secretary, that means that you get to expedite checks and count money and all that in that role?

Jones: That's right. I do. They consider me as captain of the finance committee in the Deacon's Room. Or chairman of the finance committee, that's the way I'm listed as chairman of the finance committee.

Q: If you had your life to live over, you would still be a deacon and a finance chairperson?

Jones: I would want that even sooner in life. I've rambled around for years not even being really connected to the church. Although I attended, I wasn't really connected. And long before then. I don't know whether you know it or not, but I was baptized in 1984. Very advanced age.

Q: You consider that as being a milestone in your life?

Jones: I think so. Yeah.

Q: Okay, who was in attendance, family wise, at that particular baptism?

Jones: And there was a surprise for me. When I came out of the room after I dressed, my sister from South Carolina was standing there. I didn't even know that she was in town or that she was coming. But it seems my wife had called her and told her what was going on, and she just came up.

Q: It was a celebration.

Jones: Yeah.

Q: With the baptism. Did you have a get together after this baptism?

Jones: I don't think so. I think we probably talked about it, and went home. We did. We went home and prayed and talked about it and had dinner. That's a get together. But it was just the

family, you know.

Q: You've had a great life in Newark, you know. And now that you are in a position, even though it doesn't pay a salary, you feel that in some way you are getting paid for the services that you render as a deacon and as a chairman of the finance committee. It's a good role model.

Jones: And if they paid me, I'd give it back to them.

Q: So money is not.

Jones: No. Not now. Oh money meant a lot to me, but now, as long as I have enough to live on.

Q: You're doing all right.

Jones: Yeah. I'm doing fine.

Q: You have a roof over your head and you have lots of friends.

Jones: Thank you.

Q: And that's what life is all about.

Jones: That's important. That's very important.

Q: There was a significant incident in your life that you want to conclude to tell me about. So go ahead, Mr. Jones.

Jones: Well, in the little town where I was born, there was a factory called an oil mill. And their employees had the oil mill houses, we called them. It was just little houses, maybe three or four

rooms, something like that, right straight through. But they were, the employees lived in them. And on the street where I lived was three houses down at the end of the street, three little houses right together. And I remember one night these houses caught on fire somehow. And they all burned down right to the ground. In the town there was no, it had a volunteer fire department or something in the town at that time. It was years ago. And the thing that I remember most was my mother said to me, don't go down there. And I wondered why she didn't want me to go down. So you know what happened, don't you?

Q: No. What happened?

Jones: I sneaked away and went down anyway.

Q: Went there anyway.

Jones: I must have been about four or five years old. I don't remember. Anyway, a lady got burned up in one of the houses, and she was still holding the baby to her bosom when she burned. Laying on those springs and the bed and everything and mattress was all burned up. I'll never forget that. Never forget it. That's one of the worse things I guess I've ever seen.

Q: And it's still vivid in my mind today?

Jones: Oh yeah. The only thing standing in those houses was the chimney. That's the only thing. There was three chimneys standing. That's all of those three houses. It burned right down to the ground. Fire department didn't respond. I think they had a volunteer fire department in those days. But nothing was done. They just burned. And that poor lady with her baby.

Q: Is the house still standing today? I meant the rubbish. Do you recall what was put in place at that.



Jones: There's houses built there now. You know, because those houses were burned down to nothing. There was nothing left but ashes, and chimney standing. But down at that corner now they've built two or three nice looking homes. I think they're privately owned. At that time, those were company houses, we called them.

Q: And company houses were like owned by someone else?

Jones: Owned by the company. And the employees got, like free rent. Or very little. I think they paid something like two or three dollars a month rent. That's free rent. But they were only making a dollar and a half an hour. Nine dollars a week. Was twelve hour day. And that was six days a week.

Q: And you had to pay two of those for rent.

Jones: Yeah. And food. In those days a loaf of bread was five and seven cents. A loaf of bread. Not a couple of slices, a loaf.

Q: For a whole loaf.

Jones: That's right. Sure.

Q: Probably fresh from the bakery.

Jones: Yeah. They had bakeries in the town. And it wasn't sliced, there was no sliced bread in those days.

Q: You'd get the loaf and you did your own slicing.

Jones: Did your own slicing. Or you just tore a piece off and ate it. I guess those were the good

old days. We talk about it now every once in a while, my family and I when we get together. And of the laundry down the street. Chinese laundry. We used to go pass and yell at the Chinaman, and he'd come running to the door with a cleaver in his hand like he was gonna chop up the pieces. And we'd run. It happened every day.

Q: Did you take your clothes to the Chinese laundry?

Jones: Yeah. My sister even worked in there. He's come out, yeh, yeh, yeh, yeh, yeh. You know, but he never got any further than the door. You know.

Q: Sort of threaten you a little bit to keep moving.

Jones: I think he was having fun really. Now looking back on it. He was a friendly Chinaman. And we would tease him.

Q: Make him think that you were gonna come in and do something and you didn't.

Jones: Yeah. We'd come up and say, Chet Chet the Chinaman, Chet Chet the Chinaman. You know. And he'd come running out, but he wouldn't come even out to the door with the cleaver raised. We'd run down the street. Those were the days when I was a kid. So that's a long time ago. Like I was telling you in the beginning, my mother worked for these white people, rich people, in other words. And every night I'd have to meet her and bring her home. You know. Cause she called me the man of the house. I'd have to meet her. See, we didn't have any paved sidewalks in the section we lived in. Paved sidewalks were up on Home Avenue and around that neighborhood.

Q: The elite neighborhoods where --

Jones: That's right.

Q: -- no blacks lived.

Jones: No blacks lived. So, you know, in order for me to skate I'd have to go up there. At Christmastime, we used to. Here Fourth of July they shoot off firecrackers and what not. But down south at Christmastime they shoot off the firecrackers. And I remember when I got those skates. Santa Claus brought them to me. And I put them on, and we had a cement sidewalk leading up to our door from the cement walk, for the sidewalk. I went out there on my skates to do a little skating. It was only about like from here to the window. And the boys threw the firecrackers at me, and I couldn't get back in the house on those skates. I fell about four or five times.

Q: Did you injure yourself?

Jones: No. I sat down and took those skates off and ran in the house. I know you don't want this on there, but it happened when I was a kid. I used to sneak and go to the pool and see the white folk, the rich people had a big, had their own swimming pool in the backyard. And I'd sneak in there during the day and swim, you know. I remember this one day I sneaked in there and there's a snake meeting me in the water. Swimming. Like this and, you know, like that.

Q: Sort of curving in and out.

Jones: Yeah. But they swim, they don't. I don't know how they do, but they do it. And this snake is meeting me, and I think we had eye contact. You know, eye to eye.

Q: Need I ask what happened when you saw the snake.

Jones: I almost drowned thrashing to get out of there. I splashed water all over the place, I think, getting out of there.

Q: But you got out safely.

Jones: Oh yeah.

Q: What happened to the snake?

Jones: I don't know. I didn't look back.

Q: You kept getting out. Where did you go once you got out of the pool?

Jones: Well, I guess I went back home or something. I shouldn't have been in there in the beginning, you know. So you sneak and do things, you know.

Q: Just having fun.

Jones: Yeah. We used to do all those things. One day, we used to swim in a place called Black Creek. And we'd swim. Nobody had a swimming suit. And I remember there was a trestle running over the creek. And we were up on the trestle just laying out sunning ourselves. The boys, you know. And the train came. The train was pretty close. And we didn't have enough time to run back to the land from where we were. So we had to get down underneath and hang on til the train passed.

Q: Oh my God.

Jones: You imagine that.

Q: Black Creek was where?

Jones: That was part of Hartsville, the little town where I was born. And I didn't know what

caused Black Creek. They call it, they got a name, some lake so and so. And they got a nightclub built on the shores, you know.

Q: Really.

Jones: Yeah. But Black Creek when I was down there.

Q: Now, it's got an elite name.

Jones: Oh yeah. Some name. Lake so and so. I've forgotten the name. Lake Makinaya or something. One of the rich people. And this nightclub built right on the lake. I went and took a look. I said, you see this. This is Black Creek. It was like a lot of woods out there. We'd just go on in there, you know, and take our clothes off and jump in the water.

Q: And jump in the water and have a good time.

Jones: That's where I learned to swim down there.

Q: You taught yourself how to swim?

Jones: Yeah, the boys, most of us didn't know how to swim. They'd throw you in there. You'd better get to learn the best way you can.

Q: The best way you can. Swim or die.

Jones: The boys are mean, you know, young boys like that are mean to each other. Surely, you swim or die.

Q: Those were the good old days, growing up.

Jones: Just a short distance. We used to go swim in the split rock here in Newark. Well, the split rock isn't in Newark, it's up in West Patterson I think. But we were good, we were living in Newark then.

Q: How would you get there?

Jones: Well, I had a car at that time. A 1931 Ford. Long time ago. And I'd get the boys in the car. Maybe, I'd get as many as I could you know. Because they paid me fifteen cents a piece.

Q: To hitch a ride with you, right?

Jones: So on the back of the car was what we called a trunk rack. You know, just a rack, you could let it up like this and --

Q: Put it back down.

Jones: -- like flat and put a trunk on it. And if you wanted to carry a trunk. You didn't have like now trunks in the back. You had to carry your trunk, whatever. I remember one day I was going through East Orange, and I had about seven or eight fellows. You know, I had the front of the car. It had a rumble seat this little car. And then it had the trunk rack. And I had fellows even standing on the trunk rack in the back. You know, fifteen cents a piece, you know.

Q: Get as many in there as you could, right?

Jones: Turn anybody away. I'm going through East Orange and the police stopped me. Got too many people. You're overcrowded. I said, fellows you'll have to get off. I said, you'll have to get off fellows. And they got off and they stood there, and I went all around the block and came back. Cmon fellows, get back on.

Q: All piled back in again.

Jones: Piled back in again. We went on to split rock. Oh yes, fifteen cents a piece, I had to.

Q: Had to pay for the gasoline.

Jones: Couldn't give them their money back.

Q: No, you couldn't. No refunds at this point.

Jones: No. No.

Q: But you went and you had a great time.

Jones: Oh yeah. We enjoyed it. We always enjoyed it. I went all the way across that lake in an inner tube. I often think now if I'd have had a flat out there with an inner tube.

Q: You would have been history.

Jones: That's right.

Q: You wouldn't be sitting here talking to me today.

Jones: All the way across. A fellow named Jakie Scott pushed me. I don't know you probably don't. And just laid in an inner tube, you know. And we went over there. There's a big rock over there. I guess that's why they call it split rock. And we'd climb up on that rock and just lay out in the sun.

Q: Get a suntan.

Jones: Yeah, get a suntan. As if we needed it. [Laughter] Stay about an hour and come back.

Q: Right. But you had a marvelous time.

Jones: We saved a couple of fellows lives up there though.

Q: Did you?

Jones: Yeah. Split rock. There was one part where, if you stepped off, you just went down. We never found the bottom. You know.

Q: Really?

Jones: It's so deep. But right over about ten or fifteen feet, you could just walk right out, you know. So we were walking out like that, and this fellow that was with us. He thought he could walk out off the rock on the side there. So he stepped off and went down, and he started going down and coming up, going down and coming up. So we had to form a chain, a human chain, to get him.

Q: And you finally pulled him out.

Jones: Yeah, we pulled him out. And he when he came out, he went over and put his clothes on and walked on down the road. He never said thanks fellows or nothing.

Q: He was probably petrified.

Jones: His name was Dean. Ellwood Dean.

Q: Did you see him afterwards, like later on that day or anything?



Jones: No. No.

Q: He just disappeared into the air.

Jones: Disappeared. He really wasn't a friend, a close friend of ours, but he was up there with us. And we never saved another guy surfing. His name was Williams, Rap Williams. He was out there going down and up, and we didn't know whether he was driving or what, you know. We were sitting there watching him. And after a while somebody says, he's in trouble, you know. So they started, boo, boo, boo and everything. Like he was drowning. You remember Smithy from the gas station on Thirteenth Avenue?

Q: I think so. Yes.

Jones: Well, anyway, there's a gas station there, Smithy, Art Smith. He was my best man when I got married.

Q: Is that right?

Jones: Yeah. So he swam out. He was a strong swimmer, Smithy. He swam out and got him, and we used the same technique, you know, the human chain, holding each other's hands all the way out to where he was and we pulled him in. I started thinking, you know, it must be dangerous here. I think I might have to be careful.

Q: Be careful in that particular area of the water.

Jones: There's one thing that I didn't mention. When I got married, you know, my wife, I was seeing my wife, you know. I used to come pass there. They had a Boston Street, my wife's family, the Russers. And I used to come pass there at night or an afternoon or something. And years ago, the milkman used to leave milk in a box that was sitting out in front of the store.

Q: Okay.

Jones: Come up and leave the milk there. Nobody would touch it. Big blue, it was painted dark blue. He'd leave the milk in there, you know, and nobody would touch it. It would be there the next day for sale. So we'd come up, we'd sit on that box, you know, until way in the night. Well, not, nine or ten o'clock. We didn't stay too late. We'd just sit there and talk on that box. So on this one particular day, this little car I had, I used to drive past, you know, seeing if my wife would be up in the window. And I'd idle the car down to very, very low. So it'd be very slow, going about two miles an hour, see. And I'd get out because it was, had a top, I could let the top down, you know, and everything. Let the top down and the windshield. And I'd get out and walk alongside.

END OF INTERVIEW